

VOLUNTEER POINT



The
largest
king penguin
colony in the
Falkland Islands



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The Falkland Islands archipelago lies 350 miles to the east of the South American continent. It consists of two large islands, East and West Falkland, and 780 small islands and islets.

VOLUNTEER POINT is an impressive peninsula to the north of East Falkland.



It is a privately owned nature reserve and is reached by a 3 hour journey from the Falklands capital, Stanley. The drive tests the skills of the most experienced off-road driver due to the softness of the peat.



About Volunteer Point

Named after the ship *Volunteer* which called at the Islands in 1815, Volunteer Point is part of Johnson's Harbour Farm owned by the Berkeley Sound Sheep Farming Company Ltd. The farm, one of the largest surviving in private ownership in the Falklands (36,000 acres/14,570 hectares with 15,000 sheep), has been in the same family since it was established by George Patterson Smith in 1870.

Volunteer Beach is a 2 mile long white sandy beach, bordered by high grassy banks leading down to rolling greens. These provide the ideal habitats for three breeding species of penguins: Gentoo, Magellanic and King. Other important wildlife areas are the Lagoon Bar and Volunteer Point itself where fur seals can be found on the rocks just offshore, but these sites are difficult to reach. This booklet describes the area around Volunteer Beach, home of the King penguin.





The King Penguin Colony

The Volunteer Point colony is the largest breeding group of King penguins within the Falkland Islands, where they are at the northerly limit of their global range.

King penguins have bred here since man first visited the Falkland Islands.

In 1769 Thomas Pennant, who brought the first specimen away from the Falklands, called it the 'Patagonian Penguin'.

Early records suggest that numbers were never very high at Volunteer

Point, and by 1870 they had been almost exterminated from the Islands, killed for their oil and beautiful feathers.

The colony at Volunteer Point seems to have been wiped out. However, by 1971 they had returned, with about 30 incubating adults and nine chicks present.

Over thirty years have passed since then and the colony has increased to 1,000 adults, successfully rearing over 200 chicks each year.

King penguins are increasing throughout their entire range.

They have a circumpolar distribution and also breed at South Georgia, the Crozet Islands and Kerguelen, Heard and Macquarie Islands.

The world population is estimated at 1.2 million. It is thought that the Falkland King penguin population expansion may be due to overcrowding further south at South Georgia.

Raising a King Penguin Chick

The breeding cycle of a King penguin takes longer than one year, meaning that any pair can only rear two chicks in any three year period.

The Kings here have a pre-nuptial moult. Birds that did not successfully raise chicks in the previous breeding season moult during September–October, and birds fledging a chick in the same season moult in December.

The moult time is shorter in the Falklands than elsewhere, which allows for earlier breeding – the number of breeding birds at Volunteer Point peak in January and February.

The one egg is incubated on their feet. Should the egg roll off, birds lose interest and the egg is lost for good. This is a critical stage in the breeding cycle when disturbance (and the greatest threat is from visitors) can be more damaging than for other penguin species.

The incubation period is 53 days, split into one short shift undertaken by the female, followed by four longer shifts undertaken by both male and female.

Shorter shifts are undertaken during the brood period and shift length decreases with the increasing age and food requirements of the chick.

During the guard period the chick is never left unattended by the parent birds. The length of the guard period varies between colonies at different locations, with chicks brooded for less than 33 days at Possession Island and Marion Island compared to 35 days at Volunteer Beach and up to 43 days at South Georgia.

It has been discovered that the birds in the Falklands provision their chicks more frequently than at other locations. Adult birds throughout the summer months feed at the Antarctic Polar Front where they target dense shoals of lantern fish.

Chicks remain at Volunteer Point throughout the winter. During this time adults will depart on extended foraging trips as far south as Antarctica and may not return to feed the chick for up to 5 months. During this time chicks must rely on the fat they have built up during the summer months.



Other Penguins

Over one thousand pairs of **Gentoo penguins** are resident all year round at Volunteer Point. The Falklands are one of the most important sites in the world for this species.

A count by Falklands Conservation in 2000 recorded 112,771 pairs throughout the Islands.

Breeding commences in October, with eggs hatching 39 days after laying.

Sea trips for feeding (mostly squid, lobster krill and small fish) take over two days whilst incubating, but less than half this time when feeding young birds. This reflects the constant need of the young for food and the added pressure on the adults to provide this. Young birds fledge about 83 days after hatching, in early February.

Magellanic penguins are widespread along the entire Falklands coastline, but are only present in the Islands from September to April.

They migrate considerable distances to warmer waters for the winter months. These birds nest in deep burrows, up to two metres (6 ft) deep.

The birds lay their eggs from mid-October with the average incubation period of 39 days.

In a normal season between 60 and 80% of birds successfully fledge.

There are concerns that Magellanic penguins have declined in numbers in recent years (though accurate figures are very difficult to obtain).

Studies by Falklands Conservation suggest that a shortage of food when adults are feeding chicks has led to a low survival rate for chicks.



Lobster krill – penguin food



Magellanic penguins (left) and Gentoo penguins (right)



The Wildlife of Volunteer Point



Dolphin Gull

The rocks forming the Volunteer Point headland are hard quartz-sandstones. They are among the oldest of the Falklands'

sedimentary rocks, which started their existence as sand beds deposited in shallower water at the margin of a large sea.

Plants to be found here include **Sea cabbage** along the beach, carpets of **Cushion-bog**, the daisy-flowered shrubby **Fachine** and tasty **Teaberries**.

Over forty bird species have been recorded in this area including **South American tern**,

Rock cormorant, **Blackish** and **Magellanic oystercatchers**, **Dolphin** and **Kelp gulls** and **Upland**, **Kelp** and **Ruddy-headed geese**. All three species of penguin provide easy pickings for several breeding pairs of the predatory **Falkland skua** (Sea Hen), who each target a particular group of penguins for eggs or young.

Frequently seen lying in wait along the shoreline are **Southern sea lions**, who will turn a penguin literally inside out with a savage shake. In the summer months, when birds are frequently coming and going from the shallows, several can be seen each day patrolling offshore.



Falkland skua



Ruddy-headed goose



South American tern



Sea cabbage



Teaberry



Falklands Conservation at VOLUNTEER POINT

Over 1,000 visitors come to see the penguins at Volunteer Point each year. Falklands Conservation is helping to ensure that here and at other sites throughout the Islands they all enjoy their visit without causing the wildlife undue disturbance or harm. Measures initiated by Falklands Conservation at Volunteer Point include a car parking area roped off to limit vehicle use and a ring of white rocks arranged around the king penguin colony to mark out the recommended distance from which to observe the birds. In addition information boards have been provided with maps of the

site and facts about the main bird species. Monitoring and research work is undertaken to gain a better understanding of the penguins, habits, population and ecology.

By making a donation or sponsoring one of the King Penguins at Volunteer Point, you will be directly helping to protect the colonies and maintain this important work.

For further information and to adopt a penguin visit our website:

www.falklandsconservation.com

**Visit us at the Jetty Visitor Centre,
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